

Environment Committee

March 7, 2014

House Bill No. 5424: AAC the Responsibilities of the Water Planning Council

Testimony Submitted by:

The Metropolitan District
Hartford, Connecticut

The Metropolitan District (the “MDC”), a specially-chartered municipal corporation which includes the municipalities of Bloomfield, East Hartford, Hartford, Newington, Rocky Hill, West Hartford, Wethersfield and Windsor, submits this testimony in support of the intent of HB 5424 which provides direction to the legislatively-created Water Planning Council (the “WPC”) to develop a State Water Plan; however, the MDC encourages policymakers to do so in a thoughtful and judicious manner. As a member of the Connecticut Water Works Association (“CWWA”), the MDC endorses the testimony provided by the CWWA in connection with today’s public hearing.

The primary functions of the MDC are to provide water and sewer services to approximately 110,000 customers and 400,000 people who work and reside within the territorial limits of the MDC. The MDC's raw water comes entirely from surface water sources in watersheds that cover approximately 89.7 square miles in Connecticut and Massachusetts. The main surface water supplies are the 30 billion gallon Barkhamsted Reservoir and the 9.5 billion gallon Nepaug Reservoir located in the northwest hills of Connecticut. This water resource flows by gravity through pipes to the treatment facilities in West Hartford and Bloomfield, where an average of 55 million gallons of water is treated daily. Given the responsibility of being the guardian of these assets, the MDC has a great interest in the development of a water plan.

Developing a State Water Plan is an important step in ensuring that Connecticut has sufficient public water supplies to meet the State’s current and future public health, safety and economic development needs. This State Water Plan should be developed, based on objective data and proven scientific methodologies, to ensure that laws and policies affecting water allocation are balanced and do not undermine the availability of public water supplies needed to meet the needs of residents and businesses, now and in the future. For this reason, the MDC submits that Section 1(a) of the bill, which identifies the activities that should be undertaken by the WPC must be expanded to specifically include as a necessary activity “the development of a data collection framework and identification of appropriate scientific methodologies.” This is essential to ensuring that the policies and recommendations of the end product strike a fair balance between the competing demands on the State’s valuable water resources.

In addition, the MDC recommends that this section provide that the State Water Plan be approved by a unanimous vote of the WPC. Such a requirement recognizes the

significant responsibilities that each of the four members to the WPC has and prevents a situation where one member may be able to exert undue influence over the important outcomes.

Section 1(b) of the bill identifies those items that must be components of the State Water Plan. As the provider of potable water to over 400,000 of the State's residents, the MDC believes that a component that must be included is a reference to the need to protect the availability of public water supplies to meet the State's present and future public health, safety and economic development needs. In the current draft of the bill, this critical component is missing and the MDC attributes this to an oversight. Regardless, it must be corrected moving forward.

Given that it has taken such an extended period of time to arrive at a point where the necessary resources have been marshalled, the MDC submits that the development of the State Water Plan must be performed in a thoughtful and judicious manner. The General Assembly should not pass a bill for the mere sake of passing a bill and concluding that the task has been accomplished. The bill currently establishes an ambitious schedule for the completion of the State Water Plan, January 2017. The MDC submits that the first step in the process should be the collection of data and information that will serve as the basis for the plan. After this has been completed, the Water Utility Coordinating Committee ("WUCC") process should be completed and these plans should be approved prior to the development of a State Water Plan. By virtue of the bill providing funding to the Department of Public Health for the purpose of completing the WUCC's, the MDC submits that the drafters recognize the important role the WUCC's will play in the development of a cogent and comprehensive State Water Plan.

Finally, the MDC suggests that Section 8 of the bill be amended to clarify that the funding provided to the Office of Policy and Management in this section be "for administrative purposes only," and furthermore, that there be direction provided that these funds be used for the purpose of retaining consultants for the purpose of assisting the WPC in the development of the State Water Plan as opposed to OPM providing the staff. The State's workforce has tremendous responsibilities now and it is not fair to burden those individuals with additional responsibilities but, more importantly, it is not fair to this important task. The MDC submits that it will be tremendously more efficient and effective to utilize these resources with outside consultants rather than to have the WPC staffed from within an existing State agency.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments on the bill before you today.